



Representative

**Luke
E S S E R**

Serving...

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Kirkland

Redmond

Points Communities

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Committee assignments:

- Capital Budget, vice chair
- Higher Education
- Judiciary



Report to the 48th District

Dear Friends and Neighbors,

There is one multi-billion dollar budget of state government which receives little attention outside of Olympia: the capital budget. That's unfortunate, because the capital budget funds critical construction and renovation projects in our public schools, colleges and universities.

As Vice Chair of the House Capital Budget Committee, I have learned first-hand the vital importance of the capital budget (sometimes called the "construction budget") to the students of our community.

During the last week of April (when this newsletter was written) the Legislature approved a \$2.2 billion capital budget which strongly emphasizes higher education projects:

- Replacement facilities for Bellevue Community College
- New facilities at U.W.-Bothell/Cascadia Community College
- Design money for Lake Washington Technical College

At the public school level, the Bellevue, Lake Washington and Issaquah School districts will share in a \$325 million budget we approved for school construction and renovation.

I'm proud that we substantially increased funding for public schools, colleges and universities over the governor's proposed budget. I'm even prouder that we did so without raising taxes and without undermining Initiative 601, the voter-approved state spending limit.

If you have questions, concerns or comments about the capital budget or other aspects of state government, please don't hesitate to contact me. Your input makes me a better representative.

Sincerely,

Luke Esser

State Rep. Luke Esser

Toll-free Legislative Hotline:
1-800-562-6000

Legislative information
on the Internet:
<http://leginfo.leg.wa.gov>

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Rep. Luke Esser

CAPITAL BUDGET

• HIGHER EDUCATION ON THE EASTSIDE

From the beginning of our deliberations in January there has been a consistent, bipartisan commitment to provide additional funding for community and technical colleges, which are the workhorses of our state's higher education system. In fact, almost 60% of the students at our public colleges and universities are enrolled in community and technical colleges.

My top priority this session has been finding a resolution of the Robinswood replacement crisis at Bellevue Community College, and I have also sought to provide additional capacity and better facilities for future students at BCC and other institutions of higher education. Our community and technical colleges provide cost-effective education in the fields of two-year degrees, worker training and re-training, and basic skills (including English as a Second Language and Adult Literacy), and they can do even more if provided an adequate level of resources.

Bellevue Community College is a showcase Eastside institution renowned for its technical and computer-related courses. BCC recently lost its long-term lease at the site of the former Robinswood Elementary School, displacing more than 4,500 students. This caused the cancellation of more than 100 classes and forced hundreds of other classes to meet in temporary quarters scattered throughout the Eastside. Fortunately, the Capital Budget provides BCC with the \$20 million needed to fund a replacement facility.



**Rep. Esser as Vice Chair of the
Capital Budget Committee**

This appropriation will get students out of cramped temporary quarters and provide BCC with the facilities it needs to continue providing an excellent education to future generations.

University of Washington-Bothell/Cascadia Community College will be the newest institution of higher learning in our state when it opens in the fall of 2000. The capital budget we approved appropriates \$101 million for the next phase of construction, which will accommodate more than 1,000 additional students upon completion. This cutting edge branch campus will be a tremendous educational resource for the entire Eastside.

OPERATING BUDGET

During the last week of our regular session the Legislature passed a \$20.6 billion operating budget for the 1999-2001 biennium. I voted against this budget because it fails to provide a fiscally responsible reserve amount under the voter-approved state spending limit. Our available spending reserve is less than 1/3 of 1 percent of the total budget, which could leave us unable to respond to natural disasters, changed economic conditions or other emergencies.

Teacher pay was the issue that received the most attention in this session of the legislature, and the state operating budget will provide about a 10 percent salary increase to the average teacher, with larger increases for beginning teachers.

Unfortunately, we have an outdated, statewide teacher salary scale which fails to take into account the fact that teachers in certain areas (including our community) face a much higher cost of living than those in the rest of the state. I will continue to work toward a solution that provides salary supplements for teachers from high-cost-of-living areas.

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Lake Washington Technical College provides academic and technical training to students throughout the Eastside from its Kirkland campus. It is so popular that it must expand to meet student needs. The college has been making do with aging portables, but there is a great need for a new technology resource center to teach the skills that will be needed in the next century. This need has also been addressed in the capital budget with a \$1 million appropriation for the design of a new technology resource center, which will be constructed in the future.

• **PUBLIC SCHOOL CONSTRUCTION**

We appropriated \$325 million for kindergarten-12th grade school construction across the state, a dramatic increase over the previous biennium and over what the Governor proposed in his capital budget request. These funds will be particularly valuable to school districts like the Lake Washington and Issaquah School districts, which are seeing substantial increases in new students. These funds are leveraged with dollars from local school districts to construct new schools and renovate existing schools.

• **ARTS FUNDING**

Bellevue Art Museum

\$1,250,000 to match substantial private funding for construction of their new facility in downtown Bellevue.

Kirkland Arts Center

\$9,900 to complete a structure which will cover and protect the kiln at their downtown Kirkland facility.

STATE PARKS AND WILDLIFE HABITAT

While threats were made to close some state parks, we made sure that didn't happen. In fact, we set aside money for substantial improvements.

• **Lake Sammamish State Park**

\$532,000 to renovate the electrical system and upgrade the sewer system.

\$500,000 through user fees to construct a day-use shelter to serve large groups.

• **Bridle Trails State Park**

\$186,000 to replace viewing stands, update restroom facilities and enhance disabled accessibility.

• **Urban wildlife habitat**

\$914,441 for the West Tiger Mountain Natural Resource Conservation Area.

• **Trail projects**

\$500,000 to the Redmond Parks and Recreation Department for the Evans Creek Trail.



MAKING HOMES MORE AFFORDABLE

People of average incomes are finding it harder to afford a home. In King County, home and condominium prices are up 12 percent. A recent study says that people who earn the median income in King County cannot even qualify for a loan on the average-priced home. Higher home values also mean higher property taxes.

In the capital budget, we appropriated \$62 million for the Housing Trust Fund — \$12 million more than the governor proposed. The money will be used by non-profit agencies, such as the Catholic Archdiocesan Housing Authority and the St. Andrew's Housing Group to provide housing for low-income individuals and families.

We should also be careful that government does not make the affordable housing problem worse. All too often, the costs that government regulations and taxes add to the price of homes make them too expensive for working families.

Rep. Luke Esser

I want to hear from you!

I'd like to know what issues you're interested in. If you would like to receive more information from me, please put a check mark next to the areas that interest you and write your name, address and e-mail in the space provided. You can return this form to me at 420 John L. O'Brien Building, Olympia, WA 98504. Thanks!

Currently, 60 percent voter approval is needed to pass school property tax levies. Some have suggested changing this law. What is your opinion?

- A. I support maintaining the current requirement of 60 percent voter approval.
- B. I support lowering the requirement from 60 percent to a simple majority.
- C. I support requiring all property tax increases to receive 60 percent voter approval.

Please rank your educational priorities

- ___ Raise teacher salaries
- ___ Reduce class size
- ___ Implement accountability in schools
- ___ Teacher competency testing

Please rank your transportation priorities

- ___ Additional road capacity
- ___ More HOV lanes
- ___ Increased funding for buses
- ___ Light rail

Please specify _____

Name _____

Address _____

Phone () _____

email _____

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